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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

SPECIAL ASSISTANT TO THE SECRETARY

SECRET

January 28, 1959

EUR - Mr. Merchant

Through: S/S

Whether or not there is to be a formal reply to the British Aide Memoire of January 18, the Secretary is concerned to know just what standing this document has as an expression of HMG policy. It is not clear whether it sets forth ideas that the British would not mind our expressing to Mikoyan or whether it sets forth ideas that the British believe should be reflected in replies to the Soviet note of January 10. The passage of key importance in this connection is in the last paragraph:

"For it to be possible for this line of policy to be successfully pursued it is, of course, essential that we should show absolutely no weakness in our determination to uphold our rights in relation to Berlin and to make it plain to the Russians that we would if necessary be prepared to risk a general war in support of these rights. Our firmness has already produced a gleam of light and if we keep it up the area of light may expand."

If this is a suggestion on how to play Mikoyan, it has been dealt with. If this is a suggestion on how to write a note, presumably it will be dealt with in the Four Power working group. If, however, it is a reflection of the British attitude on contingency planning, then presumably its practical application will become apparent in the tripartite discussions.

How, in the light of the foregoing, the real British position is to be ascertained is a matter on which I am sure the Secretary would be grateful for your thinking. For various reasons I imagine you would not want to ask the British point blank in the sole context of this Aide Memoire.

J. N. Greene, Jr.

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